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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1193  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1366  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CASC](#) [ER](#)  
SUBJECT: DIASPORA MEMBERS HARASSED DURING SUMMER VISIT

Classified By: CDA Jennifer McIntyrem for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Summary: Every summer the return of the beles, or prickly pears, to streets and villages of Eritrea also mark the return of the other beles, the Eritrean diaspora. While the GSE welcomes the return of the diaspora, and their foreign currency, by sponsoring festivals and events and having special airfares and hotel rates, post has encountered two reports of Eritrean American citizens being harassed and even detained by unidentified Eritrean authorities during their visits. From a consular perspective, providing services to Eritrean dual nationals is challenging as the GSE does not notify post of the detention of Eritrean American citizens. From a political perspective, given the GSE's desire and need for foreign currency, alienating the visiting diaspora by harassing them seems to contradict the message the GSE markets to its citizens abroad. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In the first case, the GSE prevented an Eritrean American citizen from leaving on her scheduled flight and detained her at the airport for no apparent reason. Over the course of the next 10 days she was repeatedly asked to appear at various government offices, some unmarked, and to present numerous papers. These unidentified Eritrean authorities asked her multiple questions about her activities in the US and in Eritrea and insisted that she had not paid the

required 2% tax all Eritrean citizens abroad are expected to pay. (Note: The 2% tax is paid at Eritrean Embassies and Consulates abroad, in foreign currency, preferably dollars or euros, and is required of any Eritrean citizen if they wish to receive services from the GSE such as the issuance of birth certificates or marriage licenses. End Note.) The Amcit came to the Embassy for assistance after several days of going back and forth with Eritrean authorities. Eventually she was able to prove she had paid the tax and was permitted to leave the country.

¶3. (C) Post became aware of the second case on August 18 when a highly distressed Eritrean American citizen came to the Embassy for assistance in departing the country. According to the woman, the GSE had detained, harangued and harassed her since her arrival in June. The Amcit noted that her problems began upon entry into Eritrea when she failed to declare the USD 10,000 she was carrying. The day following her arrival, she was asked to report to authorities. (Note: She was unsure which office she went to. Post believes it was

customs officials. End Note.) She reported she was detained in jail overnight and released the following morning when a family member posted 50,000 nakfa bail. At the time of her release, the GSE confiscated the USD 10,000 and charged her a nakfa 20,000 (USD 1333) fine. Eritrean officials subsequently provided her with the appropriate documentation to clear the violation and issued an exit visa that would allow her to depart in August. Post was never notified by the GSE of her detention. (Comment: How the GSE knew she had undeclared USD upon entering Eritrea is unclear. Post suspects the GSE compares the plane manifest with immigration forms and customs declarations and then tracks down those who did not declare foreign currency. End Comment.)

4.(C) Over the ensuing two months, Eritrean authorities repeatedly called the woman back in for questioning. Going to what she described as an abandoned building near the Nyala Hotel in Asmara, she was questioned and harassed by Eritrean officials who did not identify their office or names to her, sometimes asked to sit for hours and then told she shouldn't have come or asked why she was there. (Comment: Consular staff believe these were officials of the Eritrean National Security office. End Comment.) During the final few weeks, she was told each time was the last, only to be called in again. They often told her she couldn't leave Eritrea, despite having a valid exit visa, because everyone knew, and that they would catch her at the airport. In her final meetings, the woman was asked to return with someone who could vouch for her; and that person needed to have at least 100,000 nakfa (USD 6666) or a home. She received no explanation as to why she needed to do this and at this point she contacted the US Embassy.

15. (C) Desperate and scared with her three girls (ages 9, 12, 17 ) also Amcits) in tow, the woman came to the Embassy on August 18 for assistance. As she was afraid to leave the Consular waiting room and fearful that Eritrean Airlines would not allow her to change her tickets and that somehow they knew, Poloff personally accompanied the family to the airline office where the next hurdle involved working out payment, as Eritrean Airlines insisted on payment for the change fee in U.S. dollars (Note: The woman had only local currency, as the confiscated USD 10,000 was never returned. End Note.) After resolving the fee payment issue, the Poloff accompanied the Amcit and daughters to the airport and the family nervously departed Eritrea that night. They safely arrived dispirited and disheartened in the US on August 19. (Comment: Until actual departure of the airplane, post was equally unsure whether the family would be allowed to leave the country. End Comment.)

16. (C) Comment: Consular cases involving Americans of Eritrean descent are difficult handle. The GSE does not acknowledge dual citizenship and considers all Eritreans born in Eritrea or of Eritrean descent to be Eritrean citizens, even if they have never set foot in Eritrea. For over one year, Post has been unable to obtain meetings with the consular officials in the MFA and is not informed when Eritrean Americans are detained. We are only aware of those cases brought to our attention by the Americans themselves. From a political perspective, the GSE's heavy-handed approach to the diaspora seems driven by paranoia but ultimately may prove self-defeating. Desperate to have the hard currency from the diaspora, the GSE appears also to be fearful of the ideas and democratic beliefs many carry with their dual citizenships. Harassing dual nationals and threatening their family members in Eritrea may be a way to scare some people but may also lead to the disillusionment of the diaspora and possibly to a reduction in support from abroad. End Comment.

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